

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 MCT-01 TRSE-00 /059 W
-----050541Z 000354 /15

R 041720Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4374
INFO AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL MILAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 7275

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, IT
SUBJ: HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS CONCERNED WITH THE MAINTENANCE OF
PUBLIC ORDER MEET IN ROME AS THE SITUATION CONTINUES TO DETERIO-
RATE

REF: A) ROME 6818; B) ROME 6599

SUMMARY. MINISTERS CONCERNED WITH THE MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC
ORDER AND THE HEADS OF ALL POLICE AND SECURITY AGENCIES MET
IN A CLOSED EMERGENCY SESSION WITH PRIME MINISTER ANDREOTTI
WELL INTO THE NIGHT ON MAY 3. THE MEETING, WHICH CENTERED
ON IMMEDIATE MEASURES NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN AND REFORM THE
FORCES OF ORDER, TOOK PLACE IN A CLIMATE OF HIGH TENSION
AS EVENTS ELSEWHERE HEIGHTENED FEARS THAT THE COUNTRY IS
SLIDING TOWARDS ANARCHY. IN TURIN THE TRIAL OF 53 MEMBERS
OF THE "RED BRIGADES" URBAN TERRORIST GROUP HAD TO BE POST-
PONED INDEFINITELY AFTER PROSPECTIVE JURORS REFUSED TO
SERVE FOR FEAR OF RETALIATION. THE RED BRIGADES CLAIM
RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MURDER OF FULVIO CROCE, PRESIDENT
OF THE PIEMONTE BAR ASSOCIATION, ON APRIL 28 AND HAVE
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THREATENED FURTHER REPRISALS IF THE TRIAL CONTINUES.
IN MILAN SIX MEMBERS OF THE GANG OF RENATO VALLANZASCA,
CHARGED WITH KIDNAPPINGS, ROBBERIES, AND THE MURDERS
OF SEVERAL POLICEMEN, ESCAPED FROM SAN VITTORE PRISON.
ALL MAJOR NEWSPAPERS AND MOST POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE
CALLED FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION BY THE GOVERNMENT IN RESPONSE
TO THE INCREASING CLIMATE OF VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION.

END SUMMARY.

1. ON MAY 3 IN TURIN THE TRIAL OF 53 SELF-CONFESSED MEMBERS OF THE "RED BRIGADES", AN URBAN TERRORIST GROUP, WAS INDEFINITELY POSTPONED AFTER THE COURT WAS UNABLE TO FIND ENOUGH CITIZENS WILLING TO SERVE AS JURORS IN THE CASE. THE RED BRIGADES CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE APRIL 28 MURDER OF FULVIO CROCE, PRESIDENT OF THE PIEMONTE BAR ASSOCIATION AND THE MAN WHO SELECTED THE PUBLIC DEFENDERS WHO REPRESENT THE 53 ACCUSED, AND THREATENED FURTHER REPRISALS IF THE TRIAL CONTINUED. IN MILAN SIX MEMBERS OF THE GANG OF RENATO VALLANZASCA WHO WERE AWAITING TRIAL IN SAN VITTORE PRISON ON CHARGES OF KIDNAPPING, ROBBERY, AND THE MURDERS OF SEVERAL POLICEMEN, ESCAPED ON THE NIGHT OF MAY 3. THE SIX HAD BEEN HELD IN THE SAME CELL, WERE ALLOWED TO KEEP THEIR STREET CLOTHES, AND WERE PERMITTED UNLIMITED ACCESS TO TELEPHONES FOR OUTSIDE CALLS. IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST PRISON GUARDS AND THEIR FAMILIES WAS USED TO OPEN THE DOOR FOR THE ESCAPE. IN OTHER INCIDENTS, TWO CARABINIERI WERE MURDERED NEAR TURIN ON MAY 2 AND ROSARIO NICOLO, DEAN OF THE LAW FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ROME, WAS KIDNAPPED NEAR HIS HOME ON APRIL 28.

2. IN ROME GOVERNMENT MINISTERS CONCERNED WITH PUBLIC ORDER AND THE HEADS OF ALL POLICE AND SECURITY SERVICES MET FAR INTO THE NIGHT WITH PRIME MINISTER ANDREOTTI TO DISCUSS MEASURES TO COMBAT THE RISING TIDE OF VIOLENCE AND REFORM THE POLICE FORCES. THOUGH THE MEETING WAS CLOSED TO THE PRESS, THE GENERAL OUTLINES OF THE PROGRAM DISCUSSED HAVE EMERGED. IT APPEARS THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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JUSTICE MINISTER BONIFACIO PUT FORWARD A PROPOSAL TO EXTEND EXISTING ANTI-MAFIA LEGISLATION TO COVER POLITICAL AND COMMON CRIMES. THIS WOULD ALLOW THE COURTS TO PLACE THOSE SUSPECTED OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES UNDER CONFINO DI COLORE (INTERNAL EXILE), BUT DOES NOT GO AS FAR AS A DC INITIATIVE PRESENTLY UNDER CONSIDERATION THAT WOULD ALLOW POLICE TO USE PREVENTIVE DETENTION AT THEIR OWN DISCRETION. BONIFACIO ALSO SUGGESTED MEASURES WHICH WOULD ENCOURAGE TIGHTER APPLICATION OF EXISTING LAWS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL PANELS OF MAGISTRATES WHICH WOULD SERVE AS JURIES IN TERRORIST TRIALS. INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE PROGRAM WILL ALSO INCORPORATE PROPOSALS MADE BY INTERIOR MINISTER COSSIGA (SEE REF B) WHICH CALL FOR TIGHTER REGULATION OF FIREARMS, TIGHTER SECURITY IN PRISONS, IMPROVED EQUIPMENT AND INTELLIGENCE SERVICES FOR POLICE, AND THE COORDINATION OF POLICE, CARABINIERE, AND GUARDIA DI FINANZA ACTIVITIES BY THE INTERIOR MINISTRY. FURTHER PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON PUBLIC ORDER HAS BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT CAN PRESENT THE LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE IN ITS ENTIRETY.

3. ONLY THE RADICAL PARTY AND THE MSI OPPOSED POSTPONEMENT OF THE DEBATE ON PUBLIC ORDER. ALL PARTIES OF THE "CONSTITUTIONAL ARC", INCLUDING THE PCI, AGREED ON THE URGENT NEED FOR CONCRETE PROPOSALS FROM THE GOVERNMENT AS A BASIS FOR DISCUSSION, BUT THERE WAS SHARP CRITICISM OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S SLOW REACTION TO THE DEEPENING CRISIS. THE PSI ONCE AGAIN SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY TO RENEW ITS CALL FOR AN "EMERGENCY GOVERNMENT". PCI COMMENT WAS MORE RESTRAINED, REFLECTING GRAVE CONCERN AND A DESIRE FOR ACTION. BY FAR THE MOST SCATHING CRITICISM CAME FROM THE PRI. AN EDITORIAL IN THE PRI DAILY LA VOCE REPUBBLICANA SCORED THE GOVERNMENT FOR ITS INACTION IN THE FACE OF REPEATED ATTACKS UPON THE STATE, ASSERTING THAT THE SITUATION HAS DETERIORATED TO THE POINT THAT ITALY'S GOVERNMENT AND CONSTITUTION ARE DAILY THE OBJECTS OF NOT ONLY VIOLENCE, BUT RIDICULE. AS IN NEARLY ALL OTHER COMMENT, THE STRESS IN THE VOCE ARTICLE WAS ON THE NEED FOR IMMEDIATE AND DECISIVE ACTION.

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4. COMMENT: PUBLIC ORDER IS NOW THE MOST IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUE IN ITALY. THE ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT AT PRESENT HAS A BROAD MANDATE TO PROVIDE LEADERSHIP IN THIS AREA AND THE EXTENT OF ITS ABILITY TO DO SO MAY ALSO BE THE MEASURE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S STAYING POWER. THE DRAFT LAW OUTLINED ABOVE SEEMS TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS WHICH ANDREOTTI RECENTLY DESCRIBED TO THE AMBASSADOR (SEE REF. A) FOR A LAW WHICH WILL STRENGTHEN THE FORCES OF ORDER WITHOUT PLACING TOO MUCH STRAIN ON THE FLEXIBILITY OF THE PARTIES OF THE LEFT. WHETHER IT WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO RESTORE SHATTERED POLICE MORALE AND PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE LAW REMAINS TO BE SEEN. GARDNER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, CIVIL DISORDERS, TERRORISTS, TRIALS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 04-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977ROME07275
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770157-0718
Format: TEL
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770595/aaaadeak.tel
Line Count: 153
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 1f548c9a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 ROME 6818, 77 ROME 6599
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2643742
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS CONCERNED WITH THE MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ORDER MEET IN ROME AS THE SITUATION CONTINUES TO DETERIO- RATE
TAGS: PINT, PINS, IT
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/1f548c9a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009